



## Alcimedex 19/5

In 2009, laboratory officials in Germany were left looking red-faced when it emerged that the 15-year hunt for a suspected serial killer, “The Phantom of Heilbronn,” had in fact been a point-less exercise. Indeed, it transpired that the suspect’s DNA belonged to one of the factory workers who had been manufacturing the swabs.<sup>1</sup> She was completely innocent of all charges other than dodgy hand-washing.

This case highlighted the importance of meticulous practice when making DNA equipment and performing laboratory analyses. It also illustrated the value of control swabs and elimination DNA samples, which can at times be controversial.

More recently, a rape trial in Manchester was cancelled after it emerged that the defendant’s DNA had been contaminated at some stage within the laboratories of LGC Forensics.<sup>2</sup> The male who was accused of this crime came from Devon and had no direct link to Manchester. Consequently, there were two victims in this case before the trial had even started. LGC did not reveal the nature of the contamination but has reportedly taken measures to ensure that there will be no repeat performances.

It is interesting to note that this mishap occurred at around the same time as many forensic samples moved across to the private sector, with the Forensic Science Service (FSS) having closed down in March 2012. Alcimedex is certain that this is nothing more than coincidence.

The erotically-named condition *sexsomnia* was first described by Canadian researchers in 1996 and the term was coined by Shapiro and colleagues in 2003.<sup>3,4</sup> This contentious sleep disorder is characterised by an individual indulging in sexual activity whilst being fast asleep. (*Alcimedex understands that this is completely different from the affliction that affects the majority of men, whereby sexual intercourse induces sleep, especially when alcohol has been consumed*).

Sexsomnia can range from masturbation to sleepwalking outside in order to have sex with strangers. Since its initial description, sexsomnia has increasingly featured in the medical and non-medical literature. Indeed, it appears to be particularly newsworthy to male readers of tabloid rags, who are especially sympathetic to sufferers when they are young, nubile and attractive and are willing to tell their tragic stories in graphic detail.

As with other areas of automatism, it can be controversial: quite simply, it might be seen as a cop-out for irresponsible or criminal behaviour. Nevertheless, there have been several sexual assault cases where sexsomnia has been used successfully as

a defence by the alleged perpetrator. For instance, a 22-year old Yorkshireman was cleared in 2005 on a charge of three rapes after the court heard that he had suffered from persistent sleepwalking since the age of thirteen.<sup>5</sup> A similar case from 2005 in Canada had also resulted in a 33-year old male being cleared of rape.

However, the defence of sexsomnia was dismissed in a recent landmark case from Nottingham Crown Court,<sup>6</sup> where the alleged assailant had vehemently argued that he had no recollection of having sex with a British 17-year old girl whilst in Portugal two years beforehand. Following assessments by clinical experts, including a world-renowned sleep disorder specialist, Professor Mark Pressman, it was concluded that the reason the alleged assailant had no recollection of intercourse was because of excess alcohol, and not sexsomnia. He changed his plea and was sentenced to six years imprisonment for rape.

This case marked the first time in England that the sleepwalking defence had been successfully challenged: a defence of sleepwalking during an attempted murder had been dismissed in a case in Glasgow in 2011.

Prisoners are, by definition, a captive audience. Despite this, a recent report published in the *Lancet*,<sup>7</sup> has suggested that diet and exercise within the prison population (worldwide) are apparently being neglected, particularly among women. The study looked at data from 844 institutions in 15 countries.

The authors report that this population is ideal to focus the challenges of health promotion, especially as many of these individuals are vulnerable and difficult to engage with in the outside community. Not only could such intervention be of benefit to the individuals concerned, but reducing obesity and promoting exercise could have cost savings for the rest of society.

The reporters also make the interesting observation that many prisons across the globe offer diets that are more suited to men, and this discrepancy could account for much of the disproportionate obesity among women prisoners. Conversely, male prisoners tend to be slimmer than in the general population.

A USA charity, Medical Students for Choice (MSFC),<sup>8</sup> has offered training in abortion techniques for up to 15 medical students from the UK and Ireland. MSFC has apparently approached the British Pregnancy Advisory Service to organise “externships” to the USA,

where the issue of abortion is arguably more politicised than on this side of the Atlantic.

MSFC's sister organisation in the UK, Medical Students for Abortion Care, has seemingly written to thousands of medical students advising them of their plans.<sup>9</sup> Both organisations have argued that this stance is required to reposition the abortion debate, which they feel has shifted in recent years towards "Pro-life" and away from the "Woman's right to choose."

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The Government has announced a change to drug legislation that will allow greater freedom for appropriately-qualified nurses and pharmacists to prescribe and administer controlled drugs to patients.<sup>10</sup> Under the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment No 2) Regulations 2012,<sup>11</sup> nurse and pharmacist independent prescribers will be permitted to offer a range of medications to patients, as outlined in Schedules 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001. This therefore includes such substances as morphine and diamorphine, to be prescribed via Patient Group Directions. The Amendment became operational in England, Wales and Scotland on 23rd April 2012.

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Apparently, "*Necessity is the mother of invention.*" This axiom would certainly apply to a recent case from Somerset where a man was viciously stabbed in the neck by a neighbour.<sup>12</sup> Although the knife caused a five inch wound to his neck, the victim managed to strategically insert his doner kebab into the wound, in a valiant

attempt to arrest the haemorrhage. However, the salad-laden pitta was to prove no match for the torrential flow from his arteries and the victim lost over six units of blood before collapsing onto the pavement.

Fortunately, he survived the assault and his attacker was jailed for five and a half years. It is unclear what fate befell the kebab or whether a Doner Card system might have helped.

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